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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

A century and a quarter ago Alexis de Tocqueville observed that Americans were an association-minded people, that they had a passion for getting together. Perceptive as he was, the scholarly Frenchman could have hardly forseen that today in this country there would be some 20,000 "getting togethers" with an annual attendance estimated at 10 million.

Almost anyone in the U.S. can attend some kind of convention, whether he be hod carrier, teacher, lawyer, or candlestick maker. The conventions vary greatly in purpose, size and usefulness. At one extreme is the raucous jamboree where horseplay and revelry overshadow more serious aims; at the other, are the sedate gatherings of various learned societies and scientific organizations.

Why do professional people spend time and money to attend conventions? The Washington Post recently categorized the people who had come to the American Bar Association convention as: lawyers who look upon the ABA as a trade association to promote their interests and protect their bread and butter; politicians who are concerned with power, with who is elected to office, with who makes policy; craftsmen who come to learn, who listen to panels on highly technical subjects, and gather information to help them in their private practice, and socialists, who come to see their old buddies, to tell tales, to live it up.

Were these same types present at the NAEB convention at San Francisco? Yes, to some extent; and these disparate approaches pose a major problem, i.e., planning an agenda to satisfy a wide variety of expectations and interests. Should the program be planned to provide a lavish banquet of many morsels or with a few main courses and several special side dishes? Should people be stuffed with a continuous diet of raw meat or have a little light wine and an opportunity to relax occasionally between servings? Does our convention fit the needs of a varied membership as individuals as well as the purposes of the composite membership which is the association? Is it serving a genuine purpose or is it merely a social convention?

Answers to these questions depend upon what one conceives to be the purposes of a NAEB convention. Among other things, I suggest it should attempt to:

1. Advance the general aims of the association: improving the professional qualifications of educational broadcasters and the quality of educational and general broadcasting; working "to the end that the educational, cultural and technical benefits of broadcasting may be extended to all." The agenda should be planned accordingly, since its parts take on added force as they are preceived to be relevant to these purposes.

2. Charter new courses. This is the opportunity for setting new directions, accelerating recent moves, adding momentum to current projects, reinforcing, refocusing, or revising policies. While adhering to the general purposes, new goals need to be set and specific approaches selected. The convention is our only oppor-

3. Provide a reverberation chamber. For these three days out of 365 the members are in group milieu that makes them highly attuned to NAEB concerns both as receptors and stimulators. The convention should create a sort of cyclic-response mechanism by which officers and members interact with one another. The administrator should stimulate the audience with his conception of how and what is to be done; the audience should, through its reactions, stimulate him, and, in turn, the administrator restimulate the members through his heightened sense of their wishes and feelings as well as the sharpened focus and increased force he derives from their suggestions and insights.

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4. Reaffirm the individual in his choice of a career in educational broadcasting. A clearer perception of goals, the encouragement derived from realization that others are meeting and over-coming similar obstacles, the zest that comes from feeling a part of a forward-moving, expanding, positive movement. All these should come from the convention experience. The conventioneer should return home with strengthened motivation and heightened sense of his own challenging role in helping to build a free and informed society. He should feel this so intensively as to impart this same sort of lift to workers in his own shop.

5. Provide professional recognition opportunities for the individual. Such opportunities range from providing awards to veterans for accomplishments of the past to affording younger people a chance to contribute their ideas, share their scholarship, and exhibit their capacities. Through reading of technical papers, participation in panels, and remarks from the floor, members can enhance their status and stature among their peers and gain leadership roles in the guidance and direction of their professional organization.

6. Afford a rich and useful learning experience. The attendees should get his money's worth in terms of information and stimulation that can be effectively applied to his own work. This should include finding out about new methods, improved techniques, and the latest developments in equipment and technocracy. He should be able to gain fresh insights, novel ideas and new perspectives. And, finally, he should receive some measure of inspiration, something to "set spark to the spirit." This means not only arranging to have competent technical authorities and stimulating sessions on pertinent topics, but, above all, providing for exposure to some great minds.

7. Demonstrate the cohesion and strength of the organization. Our convention should be more than a platform for the ritualistic utterances of tribal leaders (what Hayakawa terms "accustomed sets of noises") whose principal function is to strengthen our group loyalties, reinforce our professional allegiances, and produce a common bond of reactions. Loyalty, Edgar Dale reminds us, is more than blind following; it is intelligent devotion to a cause or organization. More than grudging assent, spectatoritis, aloofness, it means getting involved, participating, helping determine which was the organization is going and taking responsibility for the consequences. It means thoughtful examination of values and then standing together on a common ground.

Our open forum business sessions provide an evironment for frank, free and open discussions that, though they may appear to produce undue stresses and strains, result ultimately in harmony, cooperation, and a feeling and thinking together that achieve not just consent but consensus. The tested fabric is the more secure. Our association can tolerate, without disintergration, much more disorganization and stress than many people recognize.

8. Be conducive to congeniality and comradeship. This is not fellowship in the American Legion sense, but in the mutuality that comes from sharing the same problems and hopes, of meeting and accepting common challenges and responsibilities. The convention provides the opportunity each year to sit down at one table,enjoy with others, experience in common. We all appreciate the yearly opportunity to renew acquaintances, reminisce with old freinds, and meet new comers. To a certain extent an NAEB member can say appropriately of his convention-going what the cabman said about taxi driving: "It's not the work I enjoy so much; it's the people you run into."

Applying these criteria to the recent gathering in San Francisco, it came close to meeting them all. Congratulations to Jim Day and his staff for a first rate production job and to all who contributed for affording those who attended a most rewarding and memorable experience. -- WGH

tunity for group "brain-storming". It provides an environment for face-to-face two-way flow of ideas in which vexing issues can be mutually explored, varied experiences brought to bear on the clarification of problems, and cooperative determinations made as to desired destinations.

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